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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MEDIA REACTION, FEBRUARY 11-18

¶1. SUMMARY: A perceived delay in the final decision on closing Manas airbase triggered speculation on whether the Kyrgyz Government's announcement on closing the base was simply an attempt to try to squeeze a few more dollars out of the United States. The U.S. stimulus-package legislation also drew a wide range of comment, including negative speculation on the future of the dollar that seemed to channel anger from the recent tenge devaluation. END SUMMARY.

WILL WE STAY OR WILL WE GO?

¶2. Pro-government, Russian-language "Central Asian Monitor" published an op-ed piece summarizing the recent financial agreements between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, commenting, "Russia had to pay quite a high price for Kyrgyzstan's decision to close Manas airbase." After pointing out that several American officials, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs have said negotiations are ongoing, the author quotes the Secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, Adakhan Madumarov, as saying "the fate of the anti-terrorist coalition airbase is determined." The author continues, "But the main question -- when will the U.S. airbase be removed from Kyrgyzstan -- is still open. It looks like Kyrgyzstan is lingering for some reason. What for? There are two options: Either the negotiations continue between Kyrgyzstan and the United States, or Kyrgyz authorities are waiting for the Russian financial aid to arrive in order to be sure that they do not end up with nothing."

¶3. "Central Asian Monitor" also interviewed Azhdar Kurtov from the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, who doubts that the Manas airbase will be closed. "We are talking about Kyrgyz President Bakiyev, who three years ago made a similar promise not just in front of the President of Russia, but also in front of the heads of SCO member states," Kurtov said. In his opinion, the technical side of airbase closure will take months, and "anything can happen during this time." Kurtov concludes, "NATO is approaching Russia's borders in Europe, the Northern Caucasus, and Central Asia. That is why Russian authorities prefer that there be no airbase."

¶4. Pro-government, Russian-language "Kontinent" noted, "Moscow is trying to expand and deepen its economic, political, and military cooperation with the Central Asian states in order to decrease Western influence there." "Kontinent" sees the base closure as a victory for Russian policy, opining, "Russia no longer has strong influence on the military and political situation in Afghanistan. However, Russia can organize everything in such a way that

Washington must discuss transit options first of all with Moscow." Pro-government, Russian-language "Novoe Pokolenie" admits, "The Russians achieved what they wanted; they pushed out their main geopolitical rival," but goes on to quote Russian political observer Alexander Sobyenin saying that Kyrgyz President Bakiyev is making "an effort to push the Americans to pay more money and to bargain with the Russians one more time." Sobyenin "is sure that the Americans will manage to persuade the Russians to prolong the rental of Manas at least until their military strikes on Pakistan and Iran. But after the military operations in these two countries are over, the Americans will no longer keep Manas."

DOLLAR ARMAGEDDON

15. Pro-government, Russian-language "Liter" published several articles on the U.S. response to the global financial crisis. First it summarized the recent U.S. stimulus package, calling it "a big puff cake, with a piece for everybody." A second article said that Treasury Secretary Geithner's bank bailout plan means "the United States will crank up its money-issuing machine." While "measures taken by the Obama Administration and its predecessors have been ineffective, the real threat will come when the U.S. economy begins to stabilize, and problems of massive currency issuing arise. Then everyone will start selling dollar assets, and America will be faced with hyperinflation. The dollar's era is coming to an end." A related "Liter" article announces that recent transactions between nations in their local currencies "are a sign of the forthcoming Armageddon of the American dollar." The author predicts a dollar collapse "at the end of this year or the beginning of the next" and criticizes the United States for "issuing unsecured dollars to increase liquidity in order to escape the crisis at the expense of others."

WE'RE NOT SO BAD

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16. Perhaps in an attempt at balance, "Liter" also took a shot at Russian television host Mikhail Leontyev, who "keeps convincing everyone that America is the enemy." However, "there are many clear-headed people who are not willing to look at the world through the sight of a gun. Once you take the gun away and look closely, it turns out that Americans are pleasant and decent people." The reason for this epiphany is an experience that "Yegemen Kazakhstan" reporter Sauatbek Abdrakhmanov had on his recent visit to the United States with Kazakhstani State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev.

"Billionaire and CNN founder Ted Turner took time during an award ceremony to introduce himself and shake hands with all of the Kazakhstani reporters." The author also praises President Obama, and quotes his inaugural speech, "Earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions," and asks, "What ideology and convictions do former citizens of the Soviet Union, some of whom view the United States as the enemy, have? Some Kazakhstanis believe in the idea of Eurasianism, connecting Russia and Kazakhstan. However, there are not so many supporters of either Eurasianism or democracy in Russia." The author concludes, "If Russia changes its diplomatic tone from an aggressive to a friendly one, it has a chance to regain its image as a respected and civilized country. Otherwise, it will have to continue disseminating Leontyev's views in Kazakhstan."

HOAGLAND